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1646

Feb. 23. "The Montgomeryshire forces began to fortifie Llan-Silin Church for the straightninge and keepinge in of Chirk Castle men, where Sir John Watts was Govnoure; who, shortly after, deserting the Castle, and marchinge towards the King's army with all his garrison, were taken by the men of Montgomery Castle after a hotte bickeringe in Church Stoke Church, the first day of Marche, 1646."

IDRIS.

THE MISCELLANIST.—No. VI.

It may be proper to mention, that the following picturesque description of the practice of burning the furze and heath on the Welsh mountains forms part of a work, designed for publication, as before noticed in the CAMBRO-BRITON*, under the title of "CAMBRIAN SKETCHES," and to the writer of which the "Sketches of Society" and the "Miscellanist" have been indebted for many interesting contributions.

* *

FURZE-FIRING.

The fire, when kindled by our shepherds, moves
Through the dry heath, before the fanning wind.

DOUGLAS.

It is customary in Merionethshire, as it is in other parts of the kingdom, to remove, at a certain season of the year, the furze and stunted heath, with which the hills are so plenteously covered, in order to provide for the cattle a more salutary and acceptable winter pasture. Their removal is effected by fire, and in Wales the season for consuming them is generally about November or December. It is by no means a custom of modern date, nor is its use peculiar to our country; for we find that it is practised in Italy, and precisely under similar circumstances. "They still use the method of burning the stubble" (we are informed), "especially in the more barren fields, in most parts of Italy, and about Rome in particular, where there is so much bad ground †." It is evident that the Italians inherit this custom from their ancestors, the Romans; and it is perhaps equally clear,

* No. 7, p. 279.

† Holdsworth, Author of the *Mucripula*.

that the Britons became acquainted with it by the same means. Virgil, in his *Georgics*, has described the practice as it existed among the Romans, and the following is the description alluded to :—

Sæpe etiam steriles incendere profuit agros,
Atque levem stipulam crepitantibus urere flammis.
Sive inde occultos vires et pabula terræ
Pinguia concipiunt : sive illis omne per ignem
Excoquitur vitium, atque exudat inutilis humor :
Seu plures calor ille vias, et cæca relaxat
Spiramenta, novas veniat quæ succus in herbas :
Seu durat magis, et venas astringit hiantes :
Ne tenues pluviae ; rapidive potentia solis
Acrior, aut Boreæ penetrabile frigus adurat.

GEORG. Lib. i. v. 84 *et seq.*

Long practice has a sure improvement found,
With kindled fires to burn the barren ground ;
When the light stubble, to the flames resigned,
Is driven along, and crackles in the wind.
Whether from hence the hollow womb of earth
Is warmed with secret strength for better birth ;
Or, when the latent vice is cured by fire,
Redundant humours through the pores expire ;
Or that the warmth distends the chinks, and makes
New breathings, whence new nourishment she takes,
Or that the latent heat the gaping ground constrains,
New knits the surface, and new strings the veins,
Lest soaking showers should pierce her secret seat,
Or freezing Boreas chill her genial heat,
Or scorching suns too violently beat.

DRYDEN'S TRANSLATION.

Furze-firing, I well remember, was a favourite pursuit of mine, when a boy, and roving amongst the wild hills in the south-western part of Merionethshire. In the dark and gloomy winter nights I was accustomed, with two or three of my young friends, and under the care and guidance of an aged and experienced shepherd, to sally forth for the purpose above specified. We had generally the clearing of one particular hill in view, and, if the wind was favourable, we accomplished our task without much toil or difficulty. There is something extremely grand and beautiful in a scene of Furze-firing. The flames at first scarcely rise

above the surrounding heath-bushes; but, as they gather strength and brilliancy from an augmentation of fuel, they burn brightly, illuminating rock, mountain, and valley, with their red and glowing glare. Now the light diminishes to a small and scarcely discernible speck; now it spreads before the wind with astonishing rapidity, brightning and enlarging in its progress, the broad bickering flame rendering the adjoining objects distinctly visible, till they are consigned to utter darkness by its complete and final extinction.

Oh! 'tis a scene sublime and dire,
To see the billowy sea on fire,
Rolling its fierce and flaky flood
O'er mountains high and tangled wood!

Nor are the persons of the incendiaries without their share of interest in the scene. To a distant spectator they seem like disembodied spirits, as their shifting figures slide along the ridges of the mountains, now bronzed by the reflection of the flames—now enveloped in smoke, or partially obscured by the surrounding darkness. Often have I assisted in a scene like this, and, although then but a child, its wild and magnificent splendour made so forcible an impression on my mind, that my memory still retains the remembrance with fond, and, perhaps, lasting fidelity.

MERVINIUS.

The following curious Anecdote, with respect to the celebrated *Ceubren yr Ellyll*, can not fail to be interesting; and the Editor feels much obliged to Sir Richard Hoare for the communication.

THE NANNAU OAK.

To the EDITOR of the CAMBRO-BRITON.

SIR,—Observing, at page 226 * of your work, an account of the celebrated Nannau Oak, I beg leave to correct an error in your description of its downfall †. During a visit to Sir Robert Vaughan, in the summer of the year 1813, this aged tree, mentioned by Mr. Pennant, attracted my notice; and on the morning of the 13th of July I made a drawing of it, in one of the most sultry days I ever felt. The succeeding night was equally hot, and on that same night this venerable Oak fell to the ground.

* No. 6.—ED.

† This is described, in the place alluded to, to have taken place during a violent storm, which, however, it appears from this account by Sir Richard Hoare, was not correct.—ED.